

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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SUBJECT: MILITARY OFFICIALS AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE
COMMENT ON HUMAN RIGHTS

REF: (A) MONTEVIDEO 1499 (DTG 201927Z APR 77) (NOTAL)
(B) MONTEVIDEO 1511 (DTG 211716Z APR 77) (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY. IN SPEECHES MAY 18 HIGH RANKING MILITARY
OFFICERS AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE BAYARDO REAFFIRMED URUGUAY'S
RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND DEFENDED ITS ACTIONS IN PUTTING DOWN
SEDITIONARY MOVEMENTS. ARMY CINC VADORA, IN AN INTERVIEW,
STATED THAT THE SURVIVAL OF THE NATION TAKES PRECEDENCE
OVER THE PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS. THE REMARKS REFLECT THE
CONTINUING CONCERN OF THE GOU REGARDING CRITICISM OF
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HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS AND THE ARMED FORCES' POSITION
THAT THEIR RECORD IS HISTORICALLY RELATIVELY GOOD. END
SUMMARY.

2. IN SPEECHES COMMEMORATING THE 166TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE
BATTLE OF LAS PIEDRAS AND ARMY DAY, ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF
MUNEZ, COL. PEDRO GONNET, COMMANDER OF THE 1ST INFANTRY

BRIGADE, AND MINISTER OF JUSTICE BAYARDO DEFENDED URUGUAY'S RECORD ON HUMAN RIGHTS, PARTICULARLY THE RIGHT TO LIFE.

2. GENERAL NUNEZ AND MINISTER BAYARDO RECALLED THAT IT WAS DURING THE BATTLE OF LAS PIEDRAS THAT ARTIGAS GAVE HIS FAMOUS ORDER "CLEMENCY TO THE VANQUISHED", REVERSING THE POLICY OF BOTH SIDES OF TAKING NO PRISONERS DURING BATTLE. NUNEZ NOTED THAT THIS WAS THE CORNERSTONE OF URUGUAYAN RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE RIGHT TO LIFE. COL. GONNET, SPEAKING FOR THE ARMED FORCES, SAID ARTIGAS' CLEMENCY ORDER WAS ADOPTED AS THE GUIDE FOR ALL SOLDIERS IN THEIR RESPECT FOR HUMAN LIFE. HE ADDED THAT A CLEAR CONSCIENCE IS THE BEST DEFENSE AGAINST THE CALUMNIES UTTERED BY UNPATRIOTIC URUGUAYANS AND ECHOED BY OTHER OVERSEAS.

3. NUNEZ AND ARMY CINC VADORA' IN AN INTERVIEW, EMPHASIZED, HOWEVER, THAT THE ARMED FORCES HAD REACTED LEGITIMATELY TO DEFEND THE NATION AGAINST AGGRESSION AND THAT IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS THE SURVIVAL OF THE STATE TAKES PRECEDENCE OVER EFFORTS TO PROTECT HUMAN RIGHTS. NUNEZ NOTED THAT IT IS WORTHWHILE TO RECALL THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE METHODS EMPLOYED BY THE SUBVERSIVE MOVEMENT WHICH WERE NOTHING LESS THAN PERMANENT VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS.

4. COMMENT: THESE SPEECHES PRIMARILY ADDRESSED HISTORIC EVENTS. THE EMBASSY HAS EXTRACTED PORTIONS DEALING WITH HUMAN RIGHTS BECAUSE OF OUR SPECIAL INTEREST. HOWEVER, IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT EVERY MAJOR SPEAKER AT THESE CEREMONIES INCLUDED MENTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN HIS UNCLASSIFIED

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REMARKS. THE MILITARY HAS BEEN STUNG BY CHARGES OF MIS-TREATMENT OF PRISONERS AND OVER THE PAST MONTHS HAS REPEATEDLY DENIED THAT GROSS VIOLATIONS OF HUMAN RIGHTS ARE MILITARY POLICY. THE LATEST COMMENTS FOLLOW CLOSELY UPON AN EMOTIONAL, IMPROMPTU SPEECH IN WHICH FORMER 2ND DIVISION COMMANDER ZUBIA DECLARED EMPHATICALLY THAT THE ARMED FORCES ARE NOT GUILTY OF ANY OUTRAGES AND THAT ACCUSATIONS OF HAVING TURNED BARRACKS AND MILITARY PRISONS INTO TORTURE CHAMBERS ARE "SLANDEROUS AND THE PRODUCT OF BASE POLITICAL INTERESTS OR THE GROSSEST LACK OF INFORMATION". SIMILAR EXPRESSIONS OF OPINION WERE VOICED BY FONMIN ROVIRA IN A NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW (REF A) AND PRESIDENT MENDEZ IN A CONVERSATION WITH THE AMBASSADOR (REF B). BOTH WERE OF THE OPINION THAT THE U.S. DID NOT UNDERSTAND THE PROBLEMS ASSOCIATED WITH REVOLUTIONARY TERRORISTS.
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